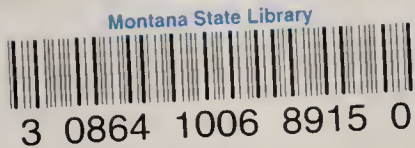


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STATE DOCUMENTS

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ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

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Pursuant to: Montana Environmental Policy Act
Section 69-6504 (b) (3)

and

The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969

Project No. FG-18

Sophie Lake Fishing Access Site

May 3, 1972

Prepared by

Montana Fish and Game Department
Recreation and Parks Division
Helena, Montana

MONTANA FISH AND GAME DEPARTMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT

SOPHIE LAKE FISHING ACCESS SITE

I. PURPOSE

Sophie Lake has become a popular recreation area, particularly for day use activities. Boating, fishing, and swimming attract many recreationists during the summer months. The Fish and Game Department acquired approximately 18 acres at the southwest end of the lake and plans to place facilities adjacent to the lake for the accommodation of the public.

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The acreage acquired by the Department is on the lake which is eight miles northwest of Eureka in Lincoln County. Access is via Montana Highway No. 37 from Eureka and then by county road to the site. The Canadian border is about four miles due north.

The facilities to be installed include a well, two single latrines, interior road, parking area, and barriers. The boat launching ramp is natural gravel and this will be improved with additions of gravel and definition. A boat dock is also planned for installation.

The planned facilities will provide picnicking, fishing, boating, and swimming.

III. DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENT

A. Human Resources

The Sophie Lake Fishing Access Site is located in a rural setting. There are few scattered dwellings in the general area. The nearest town is Eureka with a population of 1195 people. It is the county seat of Lincoln County which has a total population of 18,063. Eureka is located on U. S. Highway No. 93 and is on a direct route from the United States to Canada via the Roosville port of entry.

B. Physiography and Geology

The elevation of the lake is 2513. The area surrounding the site is gently rolling to hilly with the highest mountains several miles away rising to elevations of 6,500 to 7,800 feet.

The recreation facilities will be located on a nearly flat area adjacent to the lake. Immediately behind this area the ground rises rather abruptly for a distance of 30 to 40 feet to a flat area of some 10 to 12 acres.

The new Koocanusa Lake which will be created by Libby Dam will be less than one mile to the northwest when the reservoir is full.

The southern end of Sophie Lake consists of glacial lake and glacial drift deposits made up of silt and poorly rounded boulders respectively. These deposits are formed in conjunction with the melting of glaciers in Pleistocene times. The northern end of the lake area consists of more recent deposits of alluvium consisting of silt, sand, and gravels.

C. Land Use

The public has used the site for water based activities for a number of years. The use has been confined to the small area adjacent to the lake. There has not been any agricultural use of the area. The timber on the site is quite spotty and there is no evidence that any logging has taken place.

D. Fish and Wildlife

Sophie Lake (205 surface acres) has a mediocre trout fishery which is based largely on planted rainbow trout. Eighty-seven percent of the take by gill netting in 1966 was nongame fish - squawfish and longnose suckers. Rainbow trout averaging 13 inches long were the predominate game fish. There were a few Dolly Varden averaging 14 inches and few cutthroat averaging 12 inches. An occasional five to six pound cutthroat trout is caught. Consideration is being given to changing the planting policy from rainbow trout to cutthroat trout.

On occasion there are a few deer seen on the site as they are passing through or stopping for a drink. Other animal sightings are rare. Game birds are seldom seen in the general area.

E. Vegetative Resources

Timber on the site is quite spotty and is mostly ponderosa pine with an intermixture of Douglas fir. There is very little vegetation on the beach or proposed parking areas. Vegetation on the bench above the proposed recreation site is mostly native grasses and wildflowers.

F. Climate

Sophie Lake is quite far north in Montana and is subject to heavy snows in the winter months. The temperature gets quite

cold. Summer days are pleasant with the temperature reaching into the upper 80's or low 90's. Nights are cool.

G. Transportation Systems

There are no major highways or railroads in or adjacent to the site. A county road serves the area which connects with Montana Highway No. 37, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south.

H. Utility Systems

There are no telephone or power lines on the site.

IV. EVALUATION OF ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

A. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

The site has been used by the public for a number of years. It is very popular during the summer months for swimming. Boating and fishing are also popular. Some years ago a local service organization placed six or eight picnic tables with concrete bases and wood tops, two single latrines and four concrete fireplaces. Recently the Fish and Game Department buoyed a $\frac{1}{2}$ -acre swimming area. There have been no other improvements to the site.

The improvements to be undertaken in the project include the removal of the two single latrines and replaced with two singles with sealed fiber glass vaults. The existing picnic tables and fireplaces will remain. An entrance road and parking area will be constructed and barriers placed to control traffic. A boat dock will be constructed and there will be improvements made to the existing gravel boat launching ramp. A well will be drilled and equipped with a hand pump.

The site has been subjected to considerable impact by public use for a number of years. Uncontrolled vehicular traffic has beaten down vegetation and created dust problems. The existing pit privies do not meet Board of Health standards. There has been general overuse of the area which has created an undesirable impact. The project is designed to correct this problem and reduce the environmental impact.

B. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot Be Avoided

Sophie Lake is subject to water level fluctuation, particularly in late spring and early summer. Runoff conditions and irrigation above the lake contribute to the higher water levels that occur. When this happens, the water covers part of the recreation site to depths ranging from one to three feet. This inundation lasts for a week or more and causes no damage other than inconvenience to the public.

The grading and gravel which is planned for the entrance road and parking area will be held to a low profile and little damage from the high water is expected. The concrete picnic tables and fireplaces will remain in place as they have withstood the high water levels for a number of years. The well and the two single toilets will be placed on high ground to the south and will be in no danger of flooding. The boat dock will be well anchored to rise with the water and remain in place when the water recedes. Water levels may be affected when Lake Koochanusa is filled, however, this is determinate at the present time and will not occur until some years in the future.

We do not anticipate any exceptional problems with this water fluctuation.

C. Alternatives

An alternative to the proposed project would eliminate all facilities from the area adjacent to the lake and move them to the higher ground immediately to the south. This would necessitate the construction of an access road which would be quite costly and would create construction scars which would be difficult to soften.

Another alternative would be to eliminate the installation of the proposed facilities and leave the site in its present condition. Impact problems are now occurring and the project is intended to correct them or reduce the intrusion.

D. Short Term--Long Term Use

There will be very little impact on the area during the construction period. Construction activities will be of relatively short duration. Public use of the area is expected to continue with very little interruption.

After the facilities are placed the Department anticipates they will be sufficient to last for several years. Environmental impact on the site will be reduced by the new developments.

E. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources

The recreational resource at Sophie Lake is now being used by the public. The project will not make any further commitment of the resource. Greater protection will be provided by the installation of the facilities.

F. Discussion of Problems and Objections by Other Agencies or the Public

We do not anticipate any problems or objections by the public or other public agencies.

V. BENEFITS

The area will benefit by the installation of the facilities by giving better protection to the recreational resource. The impact of indiscriminate vehicular traffic will be confined to the roads and parking areas. Health hazards will be reduced or eliminated by moving the sanitary facilities to higher ground and out of the high water level. The public will have a better and more healthful opportunity to enjoy the recreational opportunities.

VI. SUMMARY STATEMENT

The installation of the facilities planned for the project will create only a minor environmental impact and it will be of relatively short duration. A general overall improvement of the existing situation will be realized. The public will have a better opportunity for recreational pursuits.

Mailing Distribution

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